REPORT

OF THE

SANITARY COMMITTEE

OF

THE BOARD OF HEALTH

OF PHILADELPHIA

ON THE SUBJECT OF THE ASIATIC CHOLERA

EMBRACING CERTAIN SANITARY SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

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The Sanitary Committee have had under consideration the subject of Asiatic Cholera, which has recently made its appearance in England, and, pursuing the same course which marked its progress in 1832, there is every reason to believe that it will in due time arrive in the United States again.

After the most careful investigation of its history, the Committee are prepared to submit the following *conclusions and recommendations*, as comprehending the most important characteristics of the disease, and all that is necessary to be observed at present in a sanitary point of view:—

1st. The Cholera now prevailing in Europe is essentially the same in all its general phenomena as the Epidemic which visited the United States in 1832.

2d. The Cholera is not contagious, but depends upon a peculiar morbific poison in the atmosphere, which renders Cordons and Quarantine restrictions useless. Sanitary arrangements being the only safeguard.

3rd. The Cholera is manifested by a *Diarrhœa*, which is the premonitory symptom, or *first stage*. To lie down for a few hours, with simple and appropriate remedies, may ward off an attack, and in this stage the disease is *curable;* but if neglected, or injudiciously treated, *Collapse*, or the second stage, follows the premonitory symptom of Diarrhœa, and in a large majority of instances proves fatal.

4th. No plan of treatment has been discovered by which the rate of mortality in confirmed cases of the disease can be lessened; the rates of death to cases continue to be 1 to 2½ or 3. This is nearly the ratio of all great Epidemics, as Plague and Yellow Fever.

5th. In persons of sound constitutions and of good habits, few diseases are so easily averted, WHEN THE FIRST WARNING SYMPTOMS OF ITS ATTACK ARE TIMELY ATTENDED TO AND PROPERLY TREATED. It can be prevented in 80 or 90 of every 100 cases.

6th. Although it is not in our power to change the ratio of deaths to cases, yet we can accomplish what is of equal if not of greater importance; we can diminish the ratio of cases to population.

This is to be done by Sanitary measures, or by what is termed hygiene, private and public.

7th. During the prevalence of Cholera, the morbific poison is exerting its influence with more or less intensity on almost every individual; a predisposition to the disease is existing in every one. *But so long as the constitutional forces are unimpaired, are acting with due vigour, and the equilibrium of the organs and their functions is maintained, a successful resistance is made to the Epidemic influence, and the individual escapes an attack.* Whenever any causes operate in a manner to enfeeble, to derange, or disturb violently the forces or functions of the animal economy, then, the Epidemic poison no longer opposed, exerts its destructive agency, and the disease attacks with more or less violence, according to particular circumstances.

8th. Some of the causes that thus excite the attacks of the disease belong to the individual, as connected with his diet, clothing, mode of life, and other circumstances.

The means for obviating them constitute private hygiene; others, however, are independent of the individual, are connected with and arise from, the condition of the community and the place in which he resides. Over these he can have no control. They form the subject of public hygiene, which it is the province of the Sanitary Committee duly to consider, and for the Board of Health, in conjunction with the local Municipal Authorities, to carry into execution.

9th. Observation and experience have shown, that certain conditions favor, in a special manner, the prevalence and mortality of Cholera. These conditions are,—low damp situations, and rich alluvial soils, wharves, banks of rivers and streams; and moisture or dampness from any cause; collections of filth, of vegetable and animal matters, and whatever produces offensive and noxious effluvia and miasma; foul and impure atmosphere proceeding from imperfect ventilation, narrow courts and alleys, crowded densely with inhabitants; and in fine, whatever tends either morally or physically to depress the forces of life, or disorder the system in any manner.

On the other hand, the Cholera never prevails epidemically (though it may occur in sporadic form) on rocky soil, on sandy dry tracks, like the fine sands of New Jersey, or the South; in the *well paved, well drained and dry portions of cities, and where the houses are roomy, well ventilated, clean, and not over crowded.* That is, the ravages of Cholera are scarcely felt wherever all the proprieties and decencies of life, external or public, internal or domestic and private, are carefully observed.

10th. From these general facts, the particular sanitary measures to which the attention of the Board of Health should be directed, become at once evident.

They are, an early and constant inspection of the yards and cellars of houses, with a removal of the rubbish and

filth that may be found therein, to be followed by thorough whitewashing and purification; a more frequent cleansing of the streets and gutters, and attention to paving and grading the same so as to avoid accumulations of water or garbage anywhere; an especial attention to the cleansing of private courts and alleys common to several dwellings. The suppression of pig-sties and piggeries—cleaning of foul privies with the use of deodorising agents; filling or draining of pools or ponds of stagnant water, and personal cleanliness by bathing. [In short to keep the physical and moral man *clean !*]

The above are some of the means calculated to diminish the exciting causes of Cholera, and render the Epidemic or morbific influence comparatively harmless to the community.

In addition to general cleanlinesss, the subject of *drainage, sewerage and paving* is of the greatest importance to cities as a sanitary, antiseptic and disenfectant measure, and in view of the Epidemic coming among us during the winter or spring months, demands instant attention of public authorities; so that when it does come, it may die out, from the excellency of our arrangements, which should leave nothing on which it can feed.

In conclusion, the Committee agree in opinion that by observing these simple precautionary suggestions, there is nothing calculated to excite fear or serious apprehension from Cholera, but every encouragement to allay undue solicitude, and inspire confidence and hope in the community.

The propriety of establishing local Dispensaries, where persons affected with the first, or premonitory symptom of diarrhœa, may apply for medical advice and relief, will be duly considered hereafter.

The Committee offer the following resolutions:—

Resolved, That the attention of the City Councils and the Municipal Authorities of the Districts of the County, be especially called to the subject of *sewerage;* and that said authorities be recommended to adopt measures, as early as practicable, to avoid surface drainage altogether; also to attend to street paving, so as to avoid inequalities of surface, whereby water and refuse matters accumulate; as a sanitary measure of paramount importance in the prevention and mitigation of Epidemic Cholera and other diseases.

Resolved, That the attention of the City Councils and the Municipal Authorities of the several Districts of the County, be called to a thorough and more frequent cleansing of the streets and gutters *before* 12 *o'clock in the day;* and to the cleansing of courts and alleys, and the prompt removal of filth and garbage therefrom; and that they be respectfully requested, with citizens generally, to notify the Board of Health of any accumulation of filth or rubbish, of foul courts or alleys not within their jurisdiction—also of foul privies, pig-sties or piggeries, or any yards or cellars of houses where offensive matters exist; so that by co-ordinate action we may establish a sanitary police, whereby the Epidemic influence may be in a great measure, if not entirely, counteracted.

Resolved, That the attention of our Representatives in the Legislature, the City Councils and the Municipal Authorities of the County, be called to the subject of buildings, (private residences,) within the City and Incorporated Districts, and that they be recommended to provide by Law or Ordinance for free ventilation in the construction of houses for the poorer classes, a better supply and use of water, and a restricted number of inhabitants to houses of limited dimensions, and to the removal or purification of all dilapidated buildings after a definite period.

Resolved, That the District Committees of this Board be requested to Report to the Board of Health, all houses or places in their respective districts, suspected of being in an unhealthy condition, or likely to become so; and diligently to inquire and report all causes or suspected causes of diseases in their neighborhoods, and particularly imperfect drainage of gutters in low situations, and the causes thereof—and that they be authorised to employ one or more agents to attend to or carry out the above important sanitary suggestions, when necessary.

JOHN A. ELKINTON, M. D., *Chairman*,
JOSEPH WOOD, *Secretary*,
WILSON JEWELL, M. D.,
BENJAMIN MARTIN,
SAMUEL W. WEER,
BENJAMIN E. CARPENTER,
J. E. ELDRIDGE.

Philadelphia, Nov 11*th*, 1848.

JOHN LINDSAY, *President*.

B. E. CARPENTER *Secretary*.